## Chapter 4

# The role of role models in military leaders' practice and education

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> *"But while to say the true word — which is work, which is praxis — is to transform the world…" (Paolo Freire, 2005, p. 88).*

## Abstract

Essentially, this essay examines the concept of role models in a Norwegian military context. Military leadership education in Norway has changed significantly since I first attended the Royal Norwegian Naval Academy (RNA) in the early 1980s. Military teachers, as role models or ideals, are still in the same powerful position. In this essay, I reflect on the possible impacts of role models in both Naval leadership education and practice. Through a reflective practice approach, I puzzle over some significant personal experiences that I consider as landmarks in my career.

Role models may be regarded as liberators or hindrances in a military "Community of Practice" (CoP) in which midshipmen through four years of learning and *bildung* processes are a part of. These processes may also be considered as taking place in a community of learning (CoL). Paolo Freire states this: "Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building; it is to lead them into the populist pitfall and transform them into masses which can be manipulated" (Freire, 2005, p. 65). As defenders of liberation, military leaders and teachers must engage in liberating, not oppressive actions. This, I believe, is crucial both for personal and institutional development.

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## Keywords

Military leadership, higher education, community of learning, community of practice, reflective practice, trust, integrity, research on practice, reflections on research on practice.

## Introduction

This reflective essay encompasses some intertwined elements. The overarching theme is about military role models – good and/or bad and their possible liberating or limiting impact. It is also about notions of role models in my military "upbringing" as a midshipman[2] at the RNA as well as a personal, decisive experience concerning the effects of leadership on my first commission. The term "role model" draws on two prominent theoretical constructs: the concept of role and the tendency of individuals to identify with other people occupying important social roles (Bell, 1970; Katz & Kahn 1978; Slater, 1961); and the concept of modeling, the psychological matching of cognitive skills and patterns of behavior between a person and an observing individual (Bandura, 1977b; 1986). Organizational behavior and career theorists have suggested that identification with role models is critical to individual growth and development (Dalton, 1989; Erikson, 1993; Hall 1976; Krumboltz, 1996; Schein, 1978; Speizer, 1981). Role models may also be regarded as liberators or hindrances in a military "Community of Practice" (CoP) (Wenger 1999). The above-mentioned processes may also be considered as taking place in a community of learning (CoL) (see for instance Chapman et al., 2005).

There is one influential incident which happened during my first years in the military that deserves attention. In 1986, the tragic Vassdalen disaster happened, where 16 drafted soldiers were killed in an avalanche. At that time, leadership in The Norwegian Armed Forces (NAF) was mostly order-based. To put it somewhat extremely, you were to follow orders and not question them. This changed significantly after the tragic avalanche disaster. Luckily, one might say, the disaster spawned a wide-ranging debate. The debate eventually resulted in what is called the reform of the Norwegian military leadership, which addressed the organizational structure of the military, its organizational culture, procedures, and leadership ideals. The solution to the above-mentioned challenges was the management philosophy known as mission command[3] (Chief of Defence 2012). This, in turn, would also influence Norwegian military leadership education

[2] Military student at the RNA.

[3] Mission command translates to: Oppdragsbasert Ledelse (OBL) in Norwegian.

(Kjellevold Olsen, 2017), probably for the better, by introducing broader participation in decision-making and leadership processes. The Vassdalen disaster and the changes that later took place may explain some approaches to or differences in leadership that I have experienced. My experiences with military leadership education at the RNA and later in praxis as a commissioned officer have made some everlasting impressions.

Reflective practice may be regarded as one of the ways that professionals learn from experience to understand and develop their practice (Jasper, 2003). Kolb (1984) draws attention to the fact that when we want to learn from something that has already happened to us, we need to recall our observations of the event and then reflect on those observations in some way. Kolb suggests that we frame some action as a result and that this possible course of action is seen as our 'learning'. This will then inform any action that we take as a result of the experience. Reflection is considered a process or activity that is central to developing practices (Dewey, 1933, 1938; Loughran, 1996). It also retains connotations of thinking processes and contemplative self-examination. (Leitch & Day 2000). Applied research, practically founded, is normal science – research that is based on the prevailing paradigm without threatening it (Freely after Kuhn, in Lindseth, 2020, p. 77). Through the above, I may come to a deeper understanding of certain experiential phenomena.

Norwegian military leadership education has changed significantly since I first attended the RNA in the early 1980s. This was in the Cold War era. Military teachers, as role models or ideals, are still in the same powerful position. In this essay I reflect on the possible impacts of role models in Naval leadership education and practice. I use my attendance at the RNA, but foremost one of my experiences as a commissioned officer, as my reflective case. Role models at the RNA are linked to their own formation, or *bildung* (Klafki, 2007), culture, and practice. Through a personal narrative, I will shed light on the latter and how it affected me. By using the reflective practice approach (Lindseth, 2020), I also puzzle over a particular significant personal experience that I consider cardinal in my military career.

It strikes me that many officers in the Norwegian military I have met tend to have been bound by their former education and practice – their own *bildung.* I have gone down that road myself, mainly because of a lack of critical consciousness, reflection, and an early excessive faith in the existing system. I may, as such, have taken on the role of oppressor. That is, "The oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being. They discover that without freedom they cannot exist authentically. Yet, although they desire authentic existence, they fear it. They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized" (Freire, 2005, p. 48).

But Freire also states this: "Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building; it is to lead them into the populist pitfall and transform them into masses which can be manipulated" (2005, p. 65). I will, therefore, reflect on my own practices as a commissioned officer, possible role model, military teacher, supervisor, and learner. I will also puzzle over how my understanding of liberation, learning and practice improvement began and where I believe it is going. To again return to Freire: "In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform" (p. 49). Role models have thus played an important role in my own struggle. This leads me to the original reflections, the tales I must tell.

## Episode 1 – original reflection

Bergen – autumn 1983. I reported to the RNA with high expectations. Somehow, RNA was not exactly what I presumed it to be. I expected that our military teachers were supposed to be persons with very high standards, or something that is perfect or the best possible (see for instance Olsen et al., 2021). They very early told us that we were the best of the best of Norwegian youth. Shouldn't they then also be like that? Let me first point out: Some of our military teachers were also class teachers. That is, some of them also oversaw certain administrative and managerial/leadership tasks in addition to being teachers. They were also role models by wearing uniforms with visible higher ranks, such as lieutenant commanders and above. In other words, they had positional power (Van den Brink & Steffen, 2007). In this sense, there were dominance relations between "us" and "them".

Some of them taught military leadership, and leadership is not the property of a person (McGregor, 1960). Leadership "refers to interpersonal processes in social groups, through which some individuals assist or direct the group toward the completion of group goals" (Segal, 1981, p. 45). Norwegian military leadership also relies heavily on trust as a foundation for OBL (CHOD 2020). Trust is a tool that helps individuals deal with uncertainty and, in a better way, expect different outcomes (Luhmann, 2000). Military leadership is also about counselling. That is, a concern for the subordinates' well-being (e.g., Pellerin, 2008). Counselling includes active listening and can offer a safe place to confide and resolve problems and issues (Ibid.). In other words, it is a dialogical approach.

I therefore did not expect some of my military teachers to engage in such a "top-down" or authoritarian approach as educators, but some still did. I myself have for many years embraced a dialogical approach in many situations in life, and I still consider dialogue to be my preferred praxis. And "true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking… thinking which perceives reality as process… thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved" (Freire, 2005: 92). To a certain extent, I was therefore disappointed with some of our military teachers who did not engage in dialogue. Without dialogue, there is no communication, and without communication, there can be no true education (ibid., p. 92-93).

I have for some time claimed that this positional power, visible through the military rank, is one of the most effective hindrances to effective and constructive communication. And I have on several occasions raised this particular question: If we are not able to or do not have the leverage to address difficult questions, how will we then be able to move on and better ourselves? Later, as I went into service as a commissioned officer, I experienced both good and bad military leaders who had a significant impact on my choices later in life. One military leader especially affected me – in many ways. As Lockwood et al. (2002) state: "People may be especially likely to be inspired by…negative role models, who represent a feared self, when they are intent on avoiding failure" (p. 854). On the other hand, positive role models can inspire one by illustrating an ideal, desired self, and highlighting possible achievements that one can strive for (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; 1999).

I remember thinking that my military leaders at that time were supposed to be positive role models, but a few disappointed me gravely. Some, though, had the ability to engage me in fruitful dialogue, conversations, and discussions. For that, I am grateful. They gave me hope, and hope is an integral part of what it is to be human (Webb, 2013). In leadership and psychological literature, there is a saying: "Bad is stronger than good". That is, bad emotions, bad parents, and bad feedback have more impact than good ones, and bad information is processed more thoroughly than good (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, & Finkenauer, 2001). And as Freire states: "Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world" (p. 88). Therefore, if I am ever to question anything, I cannot be silent. I will forever vividly remember the following intertwined experiences that deeply affected me.

Good role models are, in my opinion, not easily found. They are still important to us because they can provide a basis for trust, a holding point,

and someone to identify with and admire (Bowers et al., 2016). In this sense, I believe role models may act as positive contributors to one's own actions. Also, in a learning context, there will be several encounters and role models (see for instance Magnussen et al., 2021; author's translation). But can role models also become idols in whom you blindly trust – a danger? I believe they might, because without questioning or critically reflecting on your role model's intentions or actual behaviour, you may well find yourself going astray. A blatant example of a dangerous role model is the attack on the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., in January 2021. It was the cataclysmic end of a treacherous Commander-In-Chief without honour, but he is still a role model for many as I write this. This leads me to the next tale.

## Episode 2 – original reflection

I expectantly arrived at my first commission as a platoon commander after graduating from the RNA. I reported for duty with the commanding officer (CO) and his first officer (XO). This was a boot camp for drafted soldiers (recruits) in the coastal artillery, the new soldiers' first military experience. I was given command of a platoon in which I had three petty officers (NCOs) under my command. Teaching, instructing, and providing guidance were essential parts of this commission, both for the young aspiring officers and the recruits. As such, I was a practitioner, teacher, supervisor, and possible role model. But I was also a learner in the early stages of a military career, as all new graduates are.

The following experiences were, for me, a turning point in my perception of military leadership education and practice. One day, when we were to carry out a field exercise, I experienced this: At the final planning meeting, the CO ordered: When we now carry out this exercise, remember to wear the same gear as the recruits and eat the same field rations as them. Be good role models. That seemed fair enough at the time. When we later that same day met the XO and CO out in the woods, they carried with them bacon and eggs and wore raincoats and rubber boots. They did not even try to hide it. I was shocked, disappointed, and angry with them. This also raised several questions in me: How could they so blatantly ignore their own orders? Is that how you lead by example? Or is that how you wish to appear as a role model for younger officers and new recruits? What were they thinking? Could it be that my image of a military leader was based on an illusion?

I realized in that very moment that this encounter could not go unnoticed. Therefore, at the following debriefing meeting after the exercise,

I raised, for me, a somewhat problematic issue in public. I asked the CO and XO this: Why is it that you two, when you explicitly order us to lead by example, do not follow your own orders? And I exemplified it. The room went silent and icy cold. I remember seeing the CO become very angry, but he did not answer me directly there and then. He wanted me to meet him in his private chambers. Chills ran down my spine. What would happen next? Was he going to excuse his actions or teach me to do things the way he did that day in the woods?

Later that same day, he called me to his office and gave me a rough reprimand. I was, as a first lieutenant, not in the position to shame him or his XO in front of others. This was, according to him, not the way to address such issues. He pointed out clearly: If I were ever to attempt this again, he strongly advised me to address him man to man in confined quarters. Or else, it would have consequences for me. Fear struck me then, and I politely said something like, "I understand, Sir", and then he ordered me to leave. Was I to know "my place" in his entourage? I was shaken, not stirred, and I did as he ordered, but something happened in me at that moment. My reflection was that the XO exercised a certain authoritarian or restrictive leadership style, which put fear in me, and the experience of fear makes the alternative of speaking up less attractive (Guo et al., 2018). Authoritarian leaders assert absolute authority and control over employees and expect unquestionable obedience (Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, & Farh, 2004).

I felt oppressed in a way, but I did not fall apart emotionally. After all, I had completed a thorough military education which had made me somewhat emotionally resilient. One way to define resilience in the military is the ability to adapt to adversity or rebound from adverse situations (see for instance Bonanno et al., 2006). Emotional resilience may be a particularly important quality for helping professionals, as it can help them adapt positively to stressful working conditions, manage emotional demands, foster effective coping strategies, improve wellbeing, and enhance professional growth (Morrison, 2000; Collins, 2008; McDonald et al. 2012; Stephens, 2013).

## Critical and theoretical reflection

There are especially three interconnected themes or issues I have been occupied with during the critical reflection over these two stories. They have been important for me both as a military practitioner and teacher in both CoPs and CoLs. The themes, or issues are liberating or limiting leadership, trust vs. fear in leadership praxis, and integrity – from a somewhat

learning-wise perspective. For me, integrity has not always been easy to exercise. It has caused me pain and suffering, but also the utmost personal satisfaction.

## Liberating or limiting leadership?

I believe my experience with the CO has several layers or aspects to it. E.g., How did the experience in the woods affect me? And later at the debriefing meeting and finally in the CO's office? What did I expect, or did I really expect that? One might suggest that these experiences took place in both a CoP and a CoL. Why? Because I was, as mentioned above, still a learner. Yet I was also a commissioned practitioner and possible role model responsible for training and leading enlisted soldiers. I was responsible for helping to boost morale, leading by example, as well as orchestrating the professional development of my subordinates. What was at stake here was my very liberty, or emancipation – my right to express myself in the face of an oppressor without fear of consequences. Maybe I was naïve, but for me, it was a bedrock for my own sanity as a human being, albeit in a military hierarchy. Emancipation is about liberating oneself from "upbringers" (educators, parents) to lead an independent and free life (Werler, 2015, author's translation). Even so, I experienced a leader who limited my actions at the time. And I did not like it. We cannot engage in "the hypocritical formula, "do as I say, not as I do." (Freire, 2000, p. 39).

My CO took on the role of oppressor in the sense that he imposed his own understanding of leadership on me. I do not question his right to do this, but I very much question his motive(s). That is, was I not free to pursue my own understanding of effective leadership? Or as Hegel testifies: "It is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained; . . . the individual who has not staked his or her life may, no doubt, be recognized as a Person; but he or she has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness" (Hegel, 1967, p. 233). For me, this was essential. I simply had to express my personal inner beliefs about good leadership. Why should I not? For me, obedience was not the path I wanted to pursue. This again leads me to Freire, who states: "Engaged in the process of liberation, he or she cannot remain passive in the face of the oppressor's violence" (2005, p. 37). Also: Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection. (Ibid., p. 88). Word and practice should therefore go hand-in-hand. But hierarchy may inhibit voice as individuals have a fear of reprisal (Hilverda et al., 2018). Also, employee voice has an essential role to play in effective problem-solving, better decision-making by supervisors, and organizational learning (Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Detert and Burris, 2007).

The CO's reaction to my question in the aftermath of the exercise makes me wonder about the following quote by John Dewey: "The most notable distinction between living and inanimate beings is that (the former maintain themselves by renewal). A stone when struck resists. If its resistance is greater than the force of the blow struck, it remains outwardly unchanged. Otherwise, it is shattered into smaller bits. Never does the stone attempt to react in such a way that it may maintain itself against the blow, much less so as to render the blow a contributing factor to its own continued action" (p. 1). It seems to me that by reacting the way he did, he protected himself from my "blow" and, through this protective resistance, preserved his own continued actions. This has made me wonder many times in life: In which way do I react when made aware of my own behaviour? I since took voluntarily part in an extensive leadership development program in which I was given the opportunity to address my innermost fears and notions, not to mention how others reacted to my behaviour. This program made a significant difference for me later in my military career and has helped me better understand both my own and others' feelings and actions.

The CO's reprimand in his office also made me afraid, very disappointed, and angry. I was afraid in the sense that I thought I had ruined my entire military career. I was disappointed and angry because at the RNA, we were mostly taught to lead by example – and (mostly) in dialogue. And this experience proved to be the opposite. I have been thinking, why was that? And how would I now practice my own leadership? Which choices was I to take? For me, one thing became especially clear: I would never say one thing and do another. This was, for me, about integrity. I made myself one promise that day. I would forever try to stand with a straight back in my leadership positions. A praxis that I have tried to maintain – though not entirely without failure – throughout my military career. I may have been somewhat overconfident at times and thus did not monitor my own actions when interacting with others. This relates to hubris, which is the result of false confidence, leading to excessive pride about one's own abilities, attributes, or successes but without contempt towards others (Silverman et al., 2012).

As mentioned above, this experience with my CO raised many questions for me. First and foremost, I developed my own understanding of emancipative military leadership in dialogue and discussions with my subordinate NCOs and with my peer platoon commanders. I claim that this was, as Freire states: "While (the living thing may easily be crushed by superior force, it none the less tries to turn the energies which act upon it into means of its own further existence") (p. 1). I believe this was an existential question for me at the time. I could easily have followed my superior's

example that day in the woods and indulged in eggs and bacon, but I did not because I did not consider it "the right thing to do". I could also easily have exited or withdrawn from the situation. This again leads me to the following: "No matter how well a society's basic institutions are devised, failures of some actors to live up to the behaviour which is expected of them are bound to occur" (Hirschman, 1970). Even if this quote is taken from economic theory, this may have applied both to me and my CO at the time.

These stories have also inspired me to ask myself, Have I been indoctrinated or liberated from birth? Am I, as an individual, bound by previous patterns of thought and practice? (E.g., Molander, 1993). What, then, is freedom? Have I, through military leadership education and practice, been liberated, fenced in, or maybe even oppressed? I will therefore first elaborate on the ethical side of the experience. What is the right thing to do? I believe that it depends. But we must consider context first because learning is inextricably linked to context (Scribner, 1999). So, if we are to learn from experience, context must therefore be an integral part of learning.

I must admit that I have not always learned from my own experiences, or maybe not even from other's. One might consider this related to situational awareness or understanding. The concept of situational awareness (SA) is used to describe the condition in which a person, group or organization has both an overview and understanding of a situation. Endsley (1988) has defined SA as "the perception of elements in the environment within a volume of time and space, the comprehension of their meaning and the projection of their status in the near future" (Endsley, 1988, p. 97). This is fundamentally problematic because we do not perceive things the same way (see for example Carbon, 2014). Should we not then engage in fruitful dialogue to improve, or at least engage ourselves in an approach for improving a better common ground?

Liberation in praxis, teaching and learning is considered important in the Norwegian military community. We strive to develop "a critical reflective professional competence with the personnel" (FPG, p. 17). For me, this is about, e.g., liberation from existing paradigms. This may appear as a contradiction. Why? Because there are rules in the military. Some things are allowed, some are forbidden; some things are done, some are not done. The rule may suffice; it precedes judgment and is the basis for it. But then does the rule have no foundation other than convention and no justification other than usage and the respect for usage? (Compte-Sponville, 2002, p. 24). In the (Norwegian) military CoL, we therefore support the development of qualities like equality, cooperation and independence, respect, responsibility, courage, creativity, initiative, innovation, and flexibility (FPG, p. 17).

What did you learn in school today, dear little boy of mine, was once sung by Pete Seeger in 1963. These lyrics may well apply to both the military and other higher learning institutions. Freire states: "The conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided; between ejecting the oppressor within or not ejecting them; between human solidarity or alienation; between following prescriptions or having choices; between being spectators or actors; between acting or having the illusion of acting through the action of the oppressors; between speaking out or being silent, castrated in their power to create and re-create, in their power to transform the world" (p. 48). Role models in a CoL therefore have the capacity to liberate learners from their original state of mind. In this I mean that teachers and leaders in general have a golden opportunity to liberate others.

CoP can be regarded as "a model of situational learning, based on collaboration among peers, where individuals work to a common purpose, defined by knowledge rather than task" (Wenger 1998). On the other hand, CoL may be regarded, if one considers Dewey, as a process of transmission by means of communication of habits of doing, thinking, and feeling from the older to the younger (Dewey, 1922, p. 3). In this sense, the two seem intertwined, with much in common. Therefore, I consider this experience to be important for both learning and practice. And I find it somewhat complicated to separate the two. And ethics (e.g., honesty and integrity – which implies trust) are intertwined with military leadership (see for instance Lagacé-Roy, 2008).

## Some ethical considerations

With regard to ethics, I believe my experiences raise some essential ethical questions, such as, what was the right thing to do at the time and how to do it? Therefore, let me explore some ethical sides of my experience, by asking this first question: What was the right thing to do in the woods? Or, in my case, did I do the right thing? Professor Paul Otto Brunstad (2009) states this: "…therefore leaders have a special responsibility to front the organizations against everything that threatens its borders…Some of the leaders' tasks is to protect against attacks from without, but also internally, against inner resolution…" (p. 53, author's translation). So, in this matter, I could be regarded as his inner enemy who threatened his very existence as CO. In other words, I challenged his authority. Not only that, but I probably threatened his very "empire", in which he at least held positional power.

What was I to expect? To have my points of view accepted as fair and just? Let me return to Brunstad: "A just leader appears as credible and reliable in facing his employees. A just leadership style lays the foundation for trust and predictability (p. 22, author's translation). But also consider

this: "Some problems seem almost insolvable. May that mean that one has disregarded a key factor – oneself and one's role in it?" (Brunstad, 2019, author's translation). My point being: For me, this concerns virtues, or morals. As I made my choices in these matters, I made them out of my intention to do what I thought was good. It has been said ever since Aristotle that virtue is an acquired disposition to do what is good. Good is not something to contemplate; it is something to be done (Compte-Sponville, 2002, p. 19). Therefore, action is of the essence. Regarding morals, what could be more important than how they are lived and applied? (Ibid.) I believe these quotes have made my point.

Maybe I overlooked my own impact as "challenger"? It is fair to say that I got myself into trouble that day. What I did not do was look myself in the mirror and ask: How would I react if someone challenged me in public? The mirror plays a key role here. "By looking oneself in the mirror, be mirrored by others", and by not listening to what others say about oneself, one may gradually reveal the x-factor, or "the beam in his own eye", as the character Jesus Christ once allegedly said. "This kind of mirroring often hurts" (ibid.) It occurs to me as I am writing this that I probably have overlooked myself as part of the "problem" in somewhat similar situations a few times in my life and professional career. This recognition not only hurts, but it also inspires me to additionally question myself and my practice for the purpose of bettering, or at least to come to a certain peace with myself.

Doing the right thing may not be easy because it may challenge "… own initial outlooks and thus of the principles and systems they produce" (Scharff, 2021). Was I then, or am I a product of the system? Or merely a product of my own outlook? Consider this: "While gratefulness in leaders promotes desire and willingness to work among employees, to be overlooked will have the totally opposite effect" (Brunstad, 2009, p. 23, author's translation). If you, as an employee, experience gratitude from your leader, will you not then be encouraged to do the right thing? To turn the issue around: If you are merely a product of the system, will you then rather be encouraged to "do things right"? As a twist to the above quote by Scharff.

## Trust vs. fear in leadership praxis

The above division has been a subject for leadership researchers for decades (Drucker 1986). Peter Ferdinand Drucker is regarded as "the founder of modern management" (Denning, 2014). Drucker distinguished between management and leadership[4]. Much later, in 2012, the Norwegian Armed Forces (NAF) acknowledged this distinction in the new policy

[4] E.g., p. 27.

on leadership. In which you can read: "Military leaders often operate in the range between operational deliveries and administrative reporting and control" (p. 6). This may seem like a dilemma, which it truly is. The first concerns the Norwegian military leadership philosophy – *oppdragsbasert ledelse* (OBL/mission command). OBL encourages the use of creativity throughout the organization. The successful application of mission-based management is the result of junior leaders at all levels taking targeted initiatives based on their senior officer's intentions (Ibid).

This leadership philosophy is based on trust: Senior staff must be able to feel confident that their subordinates are willing and able to accomplish the task. Subordinates must be confident that their superior will appreciate independence, initiative and innovation (p. 8). The latter - administrative reporting and control, refers to the implementation of New Public Management (NPM), also in military governance. NPM in military governance challenges my message that trust is crucial for military leadership. NPM, on the other hand, has its roots in liberal politicians' underlying mistrust of staff and decision-making in the public sector (Busch, Johnsen, & Vanebo, 2002, author's translation).

As Drucker put it: "Management is a discipline. But management is also people" (p. 6). Or: "Efficiency is concerned with doing things right. Effectiveness is doing the right things" (p. 36). Here, we must acknowledge the difference between efficiency and effectiveness. "Efficiency concerns itself with the input of effort into all areas of activity. Effectiveness, however, starts out with the realization that in business, as in any other social organism, 10 or 15 percent of the phenomena—such as products, orders, customers, markets, or people—produce 80 to 90 percent of the results" (ibid.). Therefore, leadership (and management) applies to both structure and individuals.

Given this, we may well regard leadership as a crux in which words of meaning can be or are embedded. When we again consider Freire, who states: "Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection" (p. 88), we may see that leadership is more than just words. It is also highly action-oriented. But leadership can also be dangerous. According to Professor J. K. Arnulf (2020), the dangers can be divided into three interconnected but slightly different areas. Leadership as an illusion, the dark side of charisma, and so-called "derailed" leadership – that is, tyrannical or incompetent leadership (Arnulf, 2020, p. 81, author's translation). Also, this coincides with destructive, or toxic leadership. Williams (2005) notes that toxic leadership appears in degrees, from the clueless who cause minor harm to the overtly evil who inflict serious damage.

As leaders, we must avoid this at all costs. We should rather strive to liberate the hearts and minds of our students and employees. Because "…

they prefer the security of conformity with their state of unfreedom to the creative communion produced by freedom and even the very pursuit of freedom" (Freire, 2005, p. 48). This recognition tells me that a good role model has not only the capacity to do good but also a moral obligation towards those who cannot see beyond or even comprehend their own perceived borders. In this, trust is essential because trust is most critical in situations that involve risk, vulnerability and being interdependent with other people (see Stouffer et al., 2008).

I regard being dialogical in encounters with students and subordinates as a strength. But it requires trust and faith in myself and in the learners. "Without this faith in people, dialogue is a farce which inevitably degenerates into paternalistic manipulation" (Freire, 2005, p. 91). "Dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialogues is the logical consequence" (ibid.). This leads me to another quote from GML: "Credibility is all about creating trust based on personal properties and competence, and by caring for others" (p. 13, author's translation). In a military sense, this clearly indicates the importance of trust. This also becomes clear in the military leadership handbook (2008), which states: "…it is incumbent on leaders to understand that trust is not limited to interactions between individuals and must be understood in terms of the general community" (p. 529). Trust is therefore not only interpersonal but must be regarded in a wider sense. Trust may be considered a force that binds us all together if executed with sincere integrity. As Freire again states: "To say one thing and do another—to take one's own word lightly—cannot inspire trust". (p. 91).

Role models are therefore, in my opinion, much like good leadership: Even if you are not entirely sure what it is, you will probably know it when you see it (Rosch & Kuzel, 2010). But role models are also subjective entities in the sense that they are different in the eyes of the beholder (Magnussen et al., 2021). Good role models, or leaders, may well inspire you to further exploration, but they may also lure you into darkness if you imitate them uncritically. You may well, therefore, explore your own ways based on your own values. As Gustav Heckman (2004) puts it: "For translating values into reality it is crucial when we act that we do not suppress fleeting awareness of our values and/or our conscience". This leads me to the final theme in this essay, which I consider paramount for all leaders, military or civilian.

## Integrity – a learning process?

By challenging any perceived paradigm, leaders may, by mere encouragement in these, for me, existential issues, hopefully be able to both reflect on

and put into action at least some new ideas that can improve practice. And I cannot deny that actions speak louder than words. But words do matter, and language changes our perceptions of the world (Scientific American, 2017). Therefore, as educators, leaders, or role models for that matter, we cannot deny the fact that we are in a position to impact others in ways of thinking and acting. This suggests that you at least have the opportunity to significantly impact those who you interact with within a CoL. In this, integrity is vital for military professionals, and a conception of good professional behaviour that best serves a profession's guiding aims (see Wolfendale 2009). Furthermore, integrity is that of soundness of moral principle and, specifically, uprightness, honesty, or sincerity (Nillsen, 2005).

I will return to my experience at my CO's office, where I was told clearly that I was not, in any way, in a position to challenge neither him nor his XO. What did I learn from this? Learning is a very complicated matter (Illeris, 2009), but I have also experienced it to be highly rewarding. You may well consider the military community at large a CoL. By that, I mean this: One of the main tasks for Norwegian military personnel is teaching others. That is, systematic teaching with effective work and evaluation methods is important (FPG, 2006). Also, a main issue is to "educate reflective professional practitioners" (p. 4). But what did I learn, or what did I expect to learn, from the incident at the CO's office?

One thing stands out clearly: I would never, ever do what he did. For me, this was like going back to the dark ages, in which fear of the inquisition was clear and present. It was about integrity. The incident shook me to my innermost foundations. But it also made me think: What went wrong here? And what did I do as a learner? I felt oppressed and deeply disturbed. But I also found myself in a world of possibilities. I claim that this learning experience coincides with this: "In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform" (Freire, 2005, p. 49).

Military role models in a CoL are expected to create a good teaching environment by facilitating and organising the individual, the practice companionship, and the development of the organisation (FPG p.23, author`s translation). As a learner in a meeting with a senior officer, or teacher, if you wish, my CO probably would have gained respect and possibly admiration if he had facilitated the exchange of opinions or views. Instead, he instructed me in a way that could have been a closed world from which there was no exit, as seen in Freire above. Nevertheless, he created a situation in which I had the possibility to transform. A principle of Kantian

ethics is that one cannot deduce what one should do from what is done. Also, Kant (1966) writes: "He is merely what education makes him". From that statement, I imagine that my CO was merely a product of his own military education and the context in which it occurred. My point being is that he and I were products of different views on leadership and, as such, divergent in our understanding of learning through dialogue and critical thinking. For me, it is all about integrity –walking the talk.

My moral compass tells me that oppression in this case can be transformed into deep learning (see for instance Fullan, 2013). Meaning that every situation that can be experienced as oppressive may spark a decisive fire in you. A fire that can burn through the darkness that you may have experienced. I may seem to have strayed somewhat from my original point, which is learning, but my personal experiences tell me nevertheless that learning from oppressive experiential phenomena may be transformed into a liberating force. One that, in this case, I may have longed for, and as such, a liberating factor in my own process.

This particular oppressive situation, which I perceived it to be, taught me that I had a choice. Taking the role as the oppressed or not, or as Freire (2005) states: "…no longer oppressor nor longer oppressed, but human in the process of achieving freedom" (p. 49). Acknowledging that I, as a learner, could be regarded as a threat did not occur to me then. Later, as I am reflecting on this day, I wish my CO could have at least considered accommodating my perspective of his own actions. Maybe, just maybe, he could have acted differently. To again quote Freire: "Discovering himself to be an oppressor may cause considerable anguish, but it does not necessarily lead to solidarity with the oppressed. Solidarity requires that one enter into the situation of those with whom one is solidary…" (ibid.). But perspective-taking was not an issue here. That is, to recognize that different actors have different experiences of the same events (LaRusso et al., 2016). He imposed his view on me without even considering asking for mine or others' opinions. As such, he became more of an indoctrinator than a teacher.

From a learning perspective, this experience can be regarded as some sort of collective incompetence (Irgens, 2021), meaning that if we are to be better practitioners, we should learn to see the patterns we have created and become a part of and learn how to break those patterns that no longer are efficient (Irgens, 2021, p. 153, author's translation). To learn how to better our professional practice, there is a need to learn how to learn (ibid.). Bettering professional practice, or the development of the profession, is a key message in the basic pedagogical view of the Norwegian Armed Forces (FPG, p. 17). A crucial part of this lies in the human perspective. "All

professional activity within the Defence takes place together with other people. And the Defence sees man as self-deciding and independent and wishes to develop a critical reflective professional competence with the personnel so that they can act flexibly, and situation-related without losing their ethical and moral points of view" (ibid.). This implies integrity, which is generally considered to be 'internal honour', that is, doing what one thinks is right because doing otherwise would undermine one's sense of one's own self-worth (see Robinson, 2007).

The above message to military officers, teachers and role models seems clear to me. If you are to develop both learners and the organization (as you are expected to), you must, under any circumstances, not oppress anyone. You are expected to be a liberator of others' hearts and minds. As leaders and role models, we are not excluded. This, timely enough, coincides with a message from the Norwegian Chief of Defence: "Mission command emphasises leadership through shared attitudes and a common mindset rather than the strict application of rules, exaggerated control and scrutiny. Good role models show the way by their readiness to take risks, consistent behaviour, positive attitudes, and ethical judgement. The concept of role model therefore includes both acting as a good example and possessing a robust set of values" (pp. 9, 11, author's translation). Also, as we wrote in GML (2012): "Integrity means one is totally on the level in relation to oneself and one's subordinates; is true to oneself and one's own principles, is aware of one's strengths and weaknesses in a self-assured, credible way without needing to put on an act" (p. 13).

We shall also not forget this: "It is about the organization's ability to learn, and to translate learning into action" (ibid., p. 7). The importance of learning is clearly stated in at least two of the Norwegian Defence Forces' normative documents. But this has no meaning if it is not practised. Functionally, oppression is domesticating. To no longer be prey to its force, one must emerge from it and turn upon it. This can be done only by means of the praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it (Freire, 2005, p. 51). Therefore, the oppressed must confront reality critically, simultaneously objectifying and acting upon that reality (ibid., p. 52). This, I believe, requires bold individuals with an extended understanding of reality. But it is also dependent on leaders who truly identify with and understand their subordinates. As stated in GML: "Effective leadership is thus an effect of three relationships: 1) between leader and subordinate; 2) between personnel and their duties (objects, events); and 3) between the leader's appraisal of and relationship to him or herself" (p. 12).

This leads me to this notion: If you are a military leader, teacher, and possible role model, you must engage in, and at least try to understand

yourself, and those you interact with. To further connect learning to leadership: "Being a good role model implies self-awareness and deep understanding of oneself and the surrounding world. By meeting others in a frank, open and straightforward manner, the leader shows respect and inspires confidence and trust. Treating people's ideas and opinions, culture, experience, and background with humility is also to show a form of respect and may be important in facilitating cooperation" (p. 11). This notion may be equally relevant to higher civilian educational institutions.

Teachers in higher educational institutions are in a position to deeply affect those they educate. This demands that you engage in frank and affectionate dialogue, even if this makes you vulnerable. Dialogue, as the encounter of those addressed to the common task of learning and acting, is broken if the parties (or one of them) lack humility (Freire, 2005, p. 90). The question may therefore be: How can I dialogue if I consider myself a member of the in-group of "pure" men, the owners of truth and knowledge…? (ibid.). If I consider myself a part of an "elite" that holds the answers to "reality" or the world, can I ever seize those precious moments where students and subordinates engage me and one another in the quest for learning more than they do now?

As I have reflected upon earlier, to be a military commissioned officer in learning and/or educational environments, integrity is of the essence. When you have a visible military rank that, in praxis, provides positional power in a hierarchy, which the military per se is, you have the power to oppress anyone with a lower rank. To put it another way, it is the power to impose structure and/or obedience on others. For military leaders, this reality requires careful consideration and understanding of one's own actions. As Freire states, "true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking…thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity—thinking which does not separate itself from action…" (Freire, 2005, p. 92).

I claim that if you really wish to engage in real dialogue, not false dialogue, military officers need to understand their impact on others in their daily work. It strikes me that only a very few officers I have met have engaged themselves in true introspection and critical reflection and maybe accomplished enlightenment. According to Immanuel Kant, the motto of the Enlightenment is: "Have the courage to use your own mind![5]" I certainly have, but it has sometimes cost me. But the courage to use one's

[5] In German: "*Habe Mut, dich deines eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen*!" (Kant, 1784/1975b, p. 53). The German word *Verstand* may be translated into the English words *mind, reason,* or *understanding*.

own mind requires general education (Lindseth, 2022). Also, it requires courage to question your own understanding and to put it to the test in conversation with others (ibid.). I have hopefully been enlightened through education, practice and countless encounters with both text and people. Being a learner, who I was – and still am, I am continuously in the process of acquiring new knowledge and understanding. Through this, I have been utterly aware of the importance of showing consistency between theory and practice, which can be considered integrity (see also CHOD, 2012, p. 13). It has been a bumpy learning process.

Let me lastly consider this: "It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours". (Freire, 2005, p. 96). To me, this has to do with true humility in meeting with others who have a different understanding of the world than mine. How can we then, as educators, communicate effectively in light of integrity and practice what is true and not false? Are we, in praxis, so bound by our history that we are unable to separate ourselves from our activities and thus are unable to reflect upon it? I believe reflections on practice and thought should not be underestimated. Akbari (2007) suggests that reflective teaching will make teachers question clichés they have learned during their formative years and will also enable them to develop more informed practice. As a leader and role model, this may equally well be applied.

## Concluding remarks, considerations, and further questions

In this personal essay, I have puzzled over some experiential phenomena that made everlasting impressions. I have been thinking about these experiences several times over the years. By having a military CO and military teachers at the RNA who made position an overly clear issue in my early military years, I was challenged to the bone. I cannot say that I was entirely surprised, though, since my CO and I had very different educational and practical backgrounds. As for my military teachers at the RNA, some provided me with a deeper understanding of good military leadership. But also, some pulled rank in an oppressive way. A hindrance to effective learning.

As a newly commissioned officer, I experienced oppression, not liberation, which I somewhat naïvely expected from my superior officers. I also experienced false dialogue, or no dialogue at all, distrust, silencing, and fear and loathing in a military and educational setting. These experiences have forever made me aware of military leaders' actions, which, in my opinion, speak much louder than words. As Freire (2005) again puts

it: "There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis" (p. 87). Therefore, integrity in word and action may also be considered a prerequisite for building and maintaining trust. Through this, there is also legitimacy in the face of subordinates, students, and the public. Is that not what we ideally strive for?

My sincere belief is that we must engage in meaningful and fruitful dialogues, obliging us to permanently rethink the very foundations of our military discipline. For the time being, there is relatively scarce general research in this field of dialogical military leadership education in Norway. Therefore, there is food for thought and research for years to come. I believe CoPs and CoLs have the potential to allow both military practitioners and scholars to challenge and improve their practice. Maybe also in higher education at large. Are we as scholars not obliged to challenge our own, or also our students and peers' understanding?

If your leaders, or even your own leadership praxis, has no other purpose than cementing the current reality, what then? Are we not expected to expand our understanding of leadership? This, I believe, is my fundamental conundrum. CoPs and CoLs are vital for further professional development. For the individuals in them, for those who take an active part in it, and for society at large. Leadership is too important to leave to positional managers alone. It must be nurtured by those who take an interest in it and by those who are elevated by liberating processes. As Freire (2005) also states: "… the pedagogy of the oppressed cannot be developed or practiced by the oppressors. It would be a contradiction in terms if the oppressors not only defended but actually implemented a liberating education" (p. 54). Therefore, as defenders of liberation, military leaders and teachers must engage in liberating, not oppressive actions. This, I believe, is crucial both for personal and institutional development. In my opinion, liberation of oneself and others must therefore be paramount for all officers or any military leader and/or teacher, regardless of where and when they serve[6].

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[6] These reflections over my personal experiences came to be during a Ph.D.-course in Reflective Practice Research in Higher Education Pedagogies at the University of South-Eastern Norway.

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